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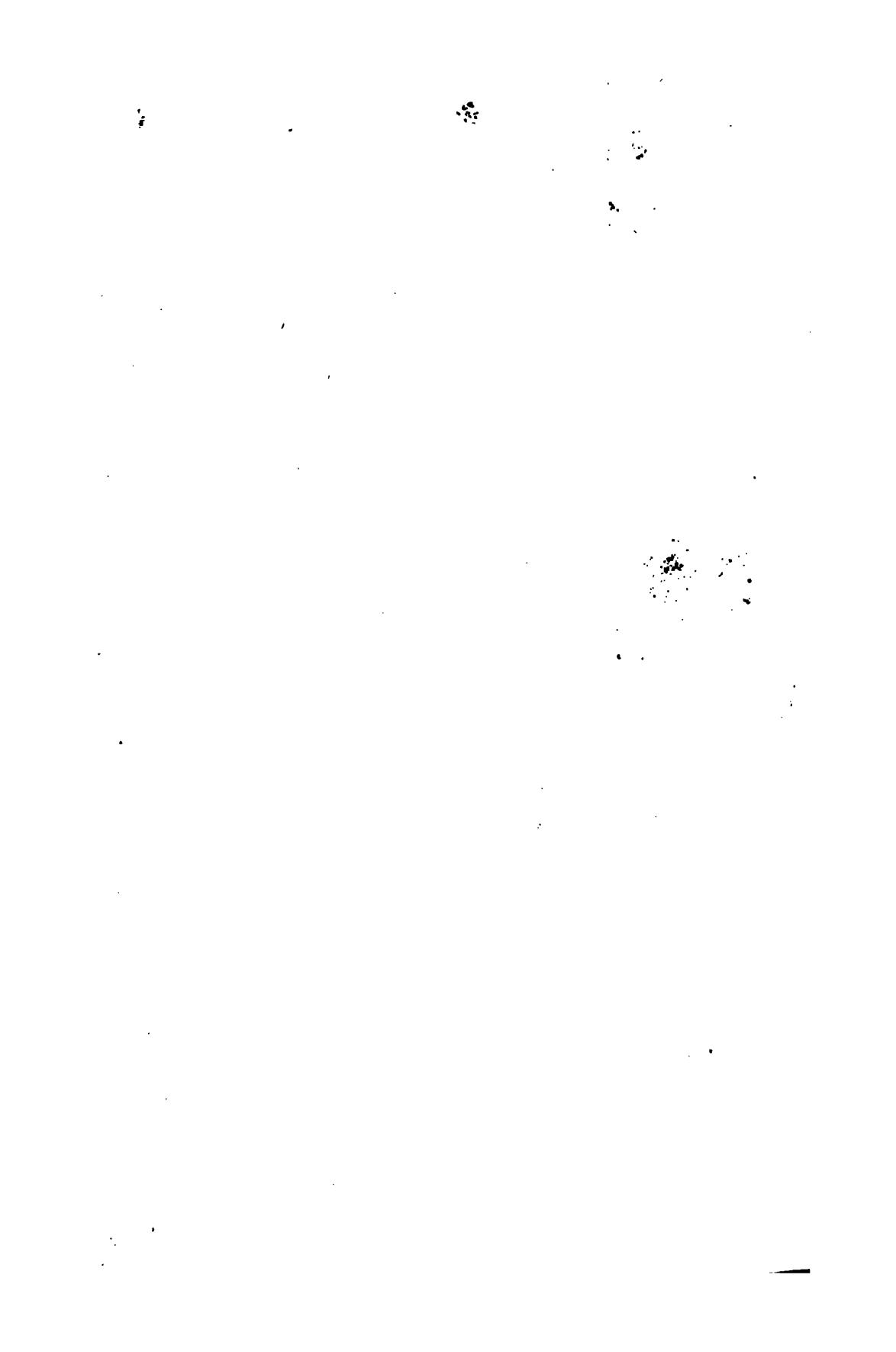
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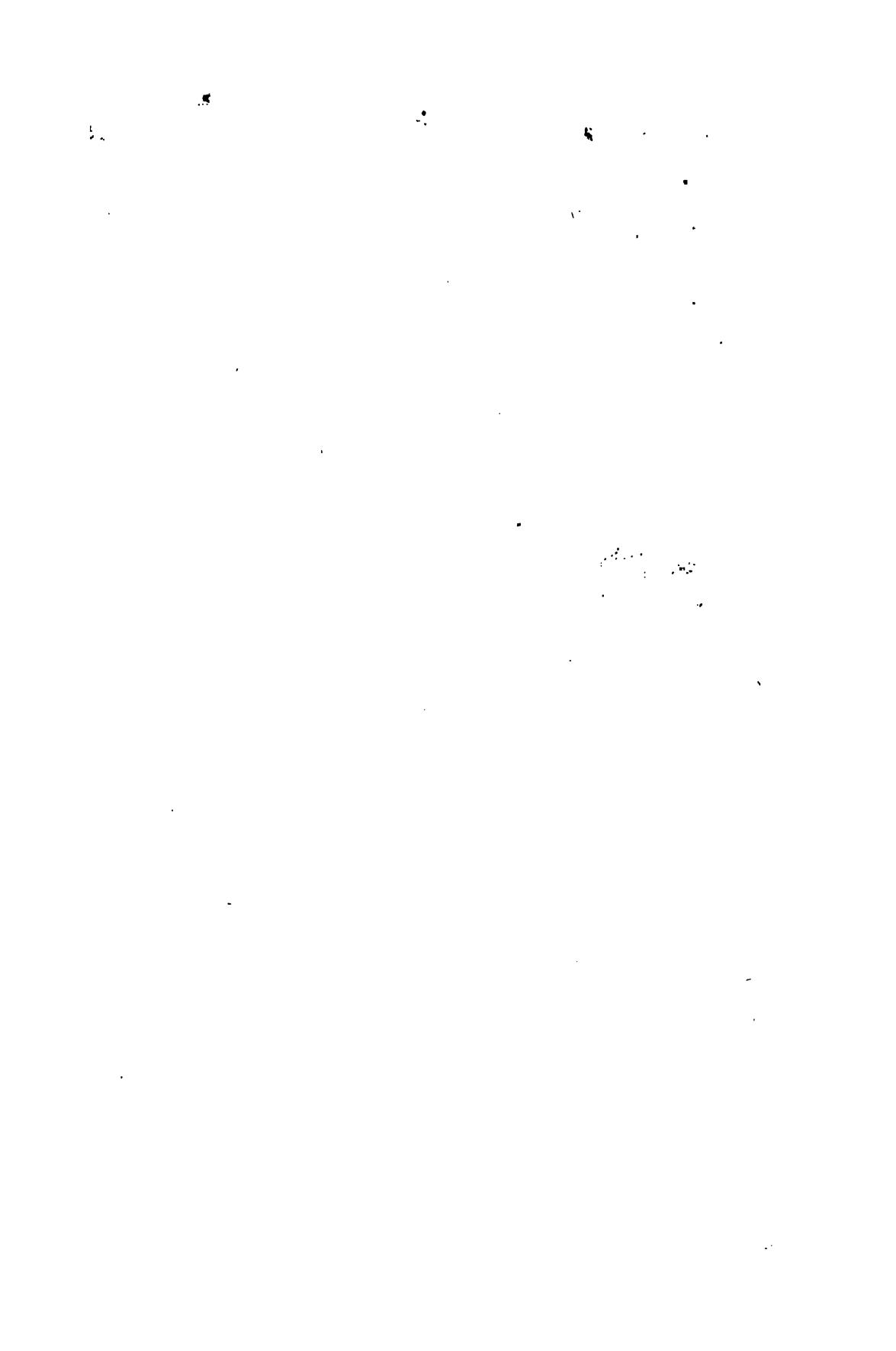




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ELEMENTS  
OF  
ENGLISH PROSODY

*FOR USE IN ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOLS.*

EXPLANATORY OF THE VARIOUS TERMS USED IN  
“ROCK HONEYCOMB.”

BY

JOHN RUSKIN, D.C.L., LL.D.,

HONORARY STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD; AND HONORARY FELLOW OF  
CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD.



GEORGE ALLEN,  
SUNNYSIDE, ORPINGTON, KENT.  
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## PREFACE.

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I HAVE never hitherto printed any book falling so far short of what I hoped to make it as this sketch of the system of English Prosody; but I had no conception, when I threw the first notes of it together, what a number of difficult and interesting questions would arise out of the variable conditions of national ear for music, and intention in song. On some of these I have not even touched in the following pages—others are only alluded to; and even the formal arrangement of elementary metre is incomplete: but I cannot delay the long-promised book longer, nor do I think my time would be well spent in endeavouring to follow out the questions it has suggested to myself. I must leave them to better scholars, while I still hope that what is here done by way of introduction to the systematic criticism of English rhythm may be of some use in checking the lawlessness of recent popular versification. I have been, however, chiefly disappointed in finding myself unable to interest any of my musical friends in

obtaining more direct correspondence between verbal and harmonic intention. I arranged the examples of verse here chosen on musical lines, hoping that my harmonic friends aforesaid would be good enough either to construct or choose for me passages of pure music which would fit the verses, note to syllable ; but I found them all incredulous or disdainful of the propriety of such correspondence, and bent, unanimously, upon establishing a code of abstract sound which should be entirely independent of meaning. Merely to show what I wanted, I have put a few chords to three of the simplest iambic measures ; and can only pray the reader to excuse—or use, perhaps, for himself—the otherwise unnecessary apparatus of bar and line.

A most interesting letter, lately received from a friend in Sheffield to whom the first proofs of the following pages had been submitted, directing my attention to the difference between the stress-accent in English verse, the (probably) intonation-accent in Greek, and the properly so-called quantity, or duration, of syllables, should have been printed *in extenso*, had I been able to answer its inquiries satisfactorily. But I know nothing whatever of Greek accentuation, while I believe the stress-accent on English words will be found always to involve delay as well as energy or loudness of pronunciation, and that, at all

events in verse, it may be considered as identical with quantity. It is true that the shrillness of a cry, or the strength of a word spoken in brief anger or appeal, will not of course imply the duration of sound ; nor am I at all sure that what, throughout the following treatise, I have called long and short syllables, may not in several, or even frequent instances, be only loud and low ones. But the stated system itself will not be found, for this reason, inaccurate ; and the reader will only have occasion to substitute for the examples in which accent has been mistaken for quantity, others, better chosen, of which the rhythmic time may be unquestionable.

CHARTRES, 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1880.



## ELEMENTS OF ENGLISH PROSODY.

---

VERSE differs from prose in being ‘measured,’ that is to say, divided into groups of words and syllables, which, when the verse is passionless, must be spoken in given times; and when it is passionate, are made more beautiful by certain modes of transgression of their constant law.

The real meaning of the word ‘verse’ is, a line of words which ‘turns’ at a certain point, as the furrow turns in a ploughed field. It partly, therefore, involves the idea of returning in *another part* of the field, and so has been ordinarily employed in the sense of ‘stanza.’ This last word, meaning, first, the chamber of a house, properly signifies a piece of a song enclosed or partitioned by itself. In this book I may permit myself to use the word ‘verse’ for a rhymed couplet or balanced quatrain; but shall generally use it of all rhythmic composition; ‘line’ for a single measured line; and ‘stanza’ for a recurrent group of lines.

The music of verse unaccompanied by instru-

mental sound, consists in the precision and graceful arrangement of the measured times of utterance,—in the beautiful and complete sound of the syllables spoken in them,—and in the variations of tone and time induced by passion in the reader. Completeness of sound in a word consists in the precision of its clear utterance, and in the rightness of the accent expressing the feeling with which it ought to be spoken.

Therefore, the measures of verse, while their first simple function is to please by the sense of rhythm, order, and art, have for second and more important function that of assisting, and in part compelling, clearness of utterance ; thus enforcing with noble emphasis, noble words ; and making them, by their audible symmetry, not only emphatic, but memorable.

The Greek word ‘metron,’ ‘measure,’ has been adopted in all languages, with just respect for the first masters of poetry, to signify a measured portion of a verse.

Each metre, in reality, consists either of actual syllables completely uttered each in its time, or of one or more of such syllables with measured rests, filling up the time required, as in bars of music. I shall use in the expression of time, therefore, the ordinary system of musical notation : a more convenient one may perhaps be afterwards devised,

but the use of our accepted musical signs will be at present easiest.

Grammarians enumerate more than twenty different metres ; but all that are of effective use in English verse are ten ; of which the names and times follow.

I. The full long syllable : which, when it is used as a perfect metre, may be equal to two of the syllables called 'long' in ordinary verse. It will be represented by the semibreve, equal to two minims,



In this couplet, each verse consists of three equal measures, the times of the syllables being indicated by the musical notes.

I am obliged to say that the full long syllable *may* be equal, instead of that it *is* equal, to two of ordinary length, because it would always depend on the reader's choice to fill up the time with his voice, or to give an interval of silence ; but the three divisions of the verse would always be kept equal ; and the two lines of the couplet would be kept equal.

The second line, it will be seen at a glance has its first metre composed of two short syllables with one long one, (two crotchets and a minim,) and the other two metres of two long syllables each. These last are a kind of metre rare in English verse ; but of all others the most important to the general system of the poetry of the world. They therefore follow second in order in our list.

II. The Spondeus.  Two syllables of equal length, uttered so deliberately that they may correspond to the time in which a man, walking firmly and serenely, takes two paces.

This metre was called Spondeus in Latin, and *σπονδεῖος* (*προύς*) in Greek, because it was the measure of the melodies used at the most solemn religious and national ceremonies, accompanied always with the '*σπονδή*', 'drink-offering,' to God.

And it has the perpetual authority of correspondence with the deliberate pace of Man, and expression of his noblest animal character in erect and thoughtful motion : all the rhythmic art of poetry having thus primary regard to the great human noblesse of walking on feet ; and by no means referring itself to any other manner of progress, by help either of stilts or steam.

In this power, the Spondeus, or time of the

perfect pace of a reasonable two-legged animal, has regulated the verse of the two most deliberate nations of the earth—the Greek and Roman ; and, through their verse, has regulated the manner, the mien, and the musical ear, of all educated persons, in all countries and times.

It is usual only to define it as consisting of two 'long' syllables ; but the actual length in time has never been stated ; and it is absolutely necessary, in order to fix proper educational laws either for music or verse, that the time of metres should be defined positively no less than relatively.¶

Now, any person holding himself well erect, and walking in regular time, so firmly that he could carry a vase of water on his head without spilling it or losing its balance, will find that he can easily take two paces in a second ; and not easily, more.

The proper length of the Spondeus will, therefore, be one second (indicated by two minimi) ; and a long syllable (indicated by a minim), forming a part of any other foot, will, primarily, have the length of half a second. From this measure we shall form all our divisions of time : noticing in what special verses, or under what particular conditions, the time may be quickened or delayed.

The Spondeus is a foot, practically, if not utterly, peculiar to the Greek and Latin races and languages.

It is inconsistent with the temper; and, except in rare cases, impossible in the tongues, of modern nations. All verses written in modern languages in imitation of the classic hexametre are forced, false, and unmusical; though, as I have said, our own rhythms are all derived from it, in proper subjection to our own tempers and tongues.

III. The Choreus,  or Choral foot, afterwards called, (but I hold, with Cicero, less rightly,) the Running or Tripping foot, 'Troche.'

A long syllable, followed by one of half of its length, and often, in the finest uses of it, with a following or intermediate quarter-second rest, adding to its deliberation and intensity, and completing the metre to spondaic time.



When used pure, and without a rest, the Choreus always has an appointed duty in securing the exaggeration of accent proper to mark passionate and eager sentiment; so that, while forced accents are allowed by the greatest writers to modify and

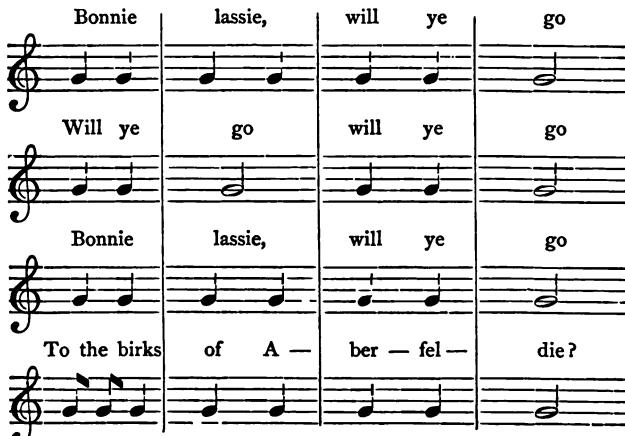
check the flow of Iambic verse, they are always used by the best masters to enforce that of Choreic, which indeed ought not to be employed at all, unless many of the accents are intended to be forced.

In this case the dramatic power is entirely master of the verse, and changes it into Iambic at will by introduced rests, as the feeling increases in depth. The same unequal relation between the syllables is, however, also obtained when, instead of the first being strongly accented, the second faints, as in exhaustion. It is this wearied and breathless Chorus,—crotchet and semiquaver,—which gives the intensely pathetic truth to the measures of the ‘Northern Farmer,’ associated with the short dactyl, which we shall see presently is derived from it.

The rest in the close of this choreic verse is the

full length of the short syllable, if the next line begins with a long one; or may pass into the beginning of the next line as a pronounced syllable; —in the above line the beginning 'a' is the close of the choreus which ended the line before.

IV. The Trochæus.  Confused by nearly all writers on prosody with the Choreus. It consists of two equal short syllables, and corresponds in time to the paces of a man running. It is a rare measure, and, indeed, almost unacknowledged in Greek verse, except as a mere acceleration of the Choreus. But it is of extreme importance in English verse, rippling in the sweetest rivulets of bright feeling or delicate haste.



Observe, however, that in fine lyric verse of this

kind, changes of accent are introduced which are entirely distinct from those of time, the metres in the word ‘Aberfeldie’ being reversed in accentuation from those of ‘lassie’ and ‘will ye’; and although, in accurate system, I must distinguish the short running foot from the firmly-set-down foot of the Chorus, I shall use the accepted term, Trochaic verse, of all lines composed of either Chorus or Troche.

V. The Iambus.  A short syllable followed by a long one. It is formed constantly by the proper accentuation of familiar, but dignified, conversational language, either in Greek or English: it is the dramatic metre in both, and in English, the Epic also. When the softened or passionate syllables of Italian replace the Latin resoluteness, it enters the measure of Dante, with a peculiar quietness and lightness of accent which distinguish it, there, wholly from the Greek and English Iambus.

And, indeed, the whole subject of Prosody has been confused, and its systematization for English readers made virtually impossible, by the want of clearly understanding the difference between accent and time.

The word ‘crusty’ is a perfect chorus formed

of a long and short syllable, with the accent on the long one.

But the word ‘crustacean’ is composed of a spondeus followed by a troche, in which, though the ‘crust’ takes, or ought to take, just as long to say as it did in ‘crusty,’ the accent is on the second syllable: and a bad verse-maker might imagine that he could therefore use the first as a short one. Which by license, he might; and describe a stage of development in such an Iambic couplet as

“In conch and claw, through sequent tribes we  
trace

Crustacean beauty from molluscous grace ;”

but he could not introduce such a line into a really melodious passage without spoiling it. Accent, therefore, is always arranged by the great masters so as to enhance and illustrate their prosody; and they require of the reader only that he should understand their meaning, and deliver it with proper accentuation: then *they* will answer for the prosody coming right. For instance:—

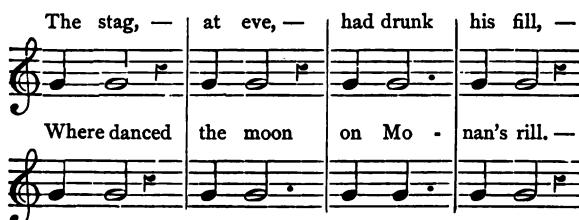
“Or that the past will always win  
A glory from its being far,  
And orb into the perfect star  
We saw not, when we moved therein.”

If the reader has intelligence enough to put the

accent on the *or*, and *be* of being, the verse comes right ; but imagine the ruin to it if a merely formal reader changed the first line into a regular iambic by putting the accent on *that*. In actual length, quality, and recipient power, the words 'or' and 'that' are precisely alike,—their value is a question of accent only.

Iambic verse, by far the most important of all in English literature, divides itself mainly into three classes—lyric, epic,\* and dramatic, each of which submit to laws and claim license peculiar to themselves.

The lyric iamb is so much accented on its second syllable that it is at the reader's option to leave a rest between it and the following foot, or, if a rest be inadmissible, to lengthen the second syllable by one-half, so as to convert the whole current of verse into spondaic time.



But in epic iambs this forced accentuation is not

\* For meaning of 'epic' see below (page 58), under the account of pentametre verse.

admissible,—even the first syllable of the iamb remaining always so weighty as to be able to carry a full diphthong without cumber; and the time of the metre being therefore oftener minim with semibreve than crotchet with minim.

The musical notation consists of two staves of four measures each. The top staff uses a treble clef and the bottom staff uses a bass clef. The lyrics are: "On old Æ-gi-na's rock, — and Hy-dra's isle, —". The bottom staff continues with: "The God of glad-ness sheds his part-ing smile." The music is in common time, with a mix of quarter and eighth notes.

The difference will be felt in a moment by putting the simplest triple-time tune to the lyric measure, which will always take it contentedly enough. Not so the epic, which can never be sung unless to equally divided or appropriately varied chords. Even the lyric, however, when pensive or earnest in the sense of it, likes to have its short syllable lengthened as soon as any musical tone is joined with it—as here, for instance, in the last line of the second couplet.

The musical notation consists of two staves. The top staff is in common time (indicated by 'C') and the bottom staff is in triple time (indicated by '3'). The lyrics are: "The stag at eve had drunk his fill,". The music features eighth-note patterns on both staves.

Where danced the moon on Mo - nan's rill ;

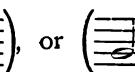
And deep his mid - night lair had made

In lone Glen - art - ney's ha - zel shade.

The dramatic iamb differs from the epic in becoming simply the more or less constant form of graceful human speech; beginning softly, and laying the force on its close; and the different arrangements of this one foot are susceptible of every kind of expression, from the most logical and deliberate narration to the extreme glow of passionate triumph, appeal, or complaint; but the specific virtue and power of the Iambus is appellant.

The root of the word is said to mean ‘to throw at,’ because Iambic verses were first used in dramatic taunt. But the natural instinct of the voice, in any appeal to another person, is to lean on the final syllable, and thus the Iambus becomes in Greek the accepted dramatic, and in English also the accepted epic, metre, through the most continuous dialogue and prolonged narration. The Iambus differs from (as far as I know) every other metre in this perfect submission to dramatic accent. It does not merely permit the interference with grace or patience; it even asks for, and rejoices in it; and “has its humour most, when it obeys.”

See, however, farther on, the analysis of its use in the pentametre.

VI. The Dactyl (  ), or (  ).

A long syllable, followed by two short ones.

It has not been yet sufficiently recognized by writers on prosody that there are two Dactyls,—the long Dactyl, formed by the division of the last syllable of a Spondeus into two, giving two seconds of time to the whole metre, as to the Spondeus from which it is formed; and the short Dactyl, formed by dividing the last syllable of the Chorus into two, the syllables being severally half a second and two-eighths of a second long,—minim and two

quavers ; or in lightest measure—crotchet and two semiquavers.

It will be most convenient to call the first of these the Heroic, and the second the Lyric Dactyl, the last being almost exclusively used in English verse. But for both, the name ‘Dactyl’—‘Finger,’ meaning a cadence composed of three joints in diminishing proportion, indicates a subtlety in the distribution of time which cannot be expressed by any musical measurement. The division of the foot, in fine utterance, sounds as if it resulted from a certain degree of languor, as if the second syllable had fallen short by some failure of power or feeling, and then the loss had been supplied by the added third. And although the heroic dactyl, since it carries the close of the line, may become nobly energetic, its power is always like the fall of a wave. It is sometimes used as an expression of rapidity ; but is then always more or less vulgar ;—its true power is in tranquillity,—“*Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis ævum*” ; or in sadness,—

“Farewell to others, but never we part,  
Heir to my royalty, son of my heart !  
Bright is the diadem, boundless the sway,  
Or kingly the death, which awaits us to-day.”

I need not spoil these lines by bars—they are

perfectly, and therefore simply, dactylic, the voice necessarily leaning always on the right syllable, and the two words ‘royalty’ and ‘diadem’ being each perfect examples of dactylic cadence.

VII. The Tribrach. Three consecutive short syllables, formed in English either from a troche or iambus by substituting two short syllables for the long one.

For El - sie Mar ley's grown sae fine,  


It is so difficult, however, in English, to pronounce three syllables without some inequality of force, that the real Tribrach is constantly interchanged with what the Greeks called an amphibrach—a long syllable between two short ones;—thus in the verse just quoted many readers would give the words “she winna” as . But for simplicity’s sake, I shall call the amphibrach, the *long* tribrach, there being in English every gradation in accent from the one to the other; and the foot being always liable to transpose itself into a dactyl or anapaest. Thus if we put some tune into

the metre of this couplet, it will come with more zest by the following division of the second line.

For El - sie Mar - ley's grown sae fine,  
She win-na get up to feed the swine.

VIII. The Anapæst,  or   
'ἀνάπαιστος,' 'struck back,' meaning a reversed dactyl. Two short syllables followed by a long one: the long dactyl reversed, giving the long anapæst; and the choreic dactyl, reversed, giving the short anapæst,—in English, the most energetic of all metres.

"Come into the garden, Maud,  
For the black bat, night, has flown,  
And the woodbine odours are wafted abroad,  
And the musk of the roses blown."

I will not spoil the lines by division; but this is their prosody:—



The intense anxiety and agitation of the lover's mind is marked by not one of the lines being exactly similar to another in its prosody; the third line might perhaps be better rendered with a long tribach.



It is often difficult in long anapæstic verse to distinguish anapæst from dactyl; but if the line is full in energy, it is sure to be essentially anapæstic.

The Assy|rian came down, | like the wolf, |  
| on the fold, |

for instance, could not be for a moment mistaken for a cadence out of the Song of Saul. The line

With the dew on his brow, and the dust on his  
mail,

is an entirely faultless anapæstic tetrametre.

This foot is also necessarily used as a *conclusive* one, in verses requiring pertinence and point.

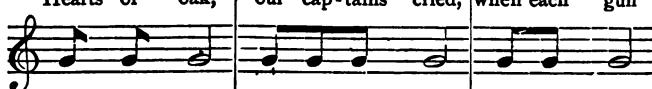
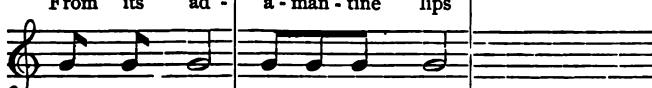
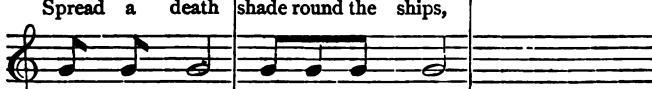
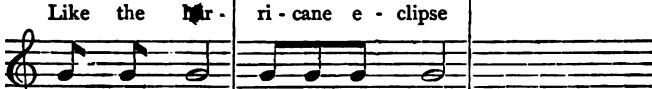
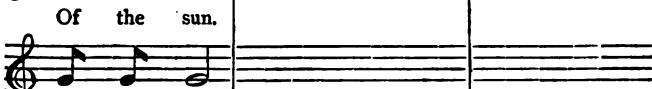
But the Pro | vost, douce man,  
                  said, Just een | let him be,  
For the toun | is well quit  
                  o' that deil | o' Dundee.

IX. The Trine Dactyl,  A long syllable followed by triplet short ones.

But ey, pur | las - sie, she was | doom, doom, doom.



X. The Trine Anapæst. The reverse of the trine Dactyl, .

Hearts of oak, | our cap-tains cried, when each gun  
  
 From its ad - a - man - tine lips  
  
 Spread a death shade round the ships,  
  
 Like the Mr. ri - cane e - clipse  
  
 Of the sun.  


Of these ten metres, variously combined, all mediæval and modern English verses are composed : but every one of them has special powers, and claims special liberties in use, of which the natural exertion and indulgence constitute fine versification. It will be the most convenient method of analysis to take the various lines used by English poets in the order of their length, and investigate in particular instances the motives and methods of construction.

English lines only in exceptional cases admit more than six metres, and contain rarely fewer than three ; but it will be best to arrange and name them systematically from one metre to six, thus :—

A Monometre line consists of one metre.

— Dimetre	—————	two	—————
— Trimetre	—————	three	—————
— Tetrametre	—————	four	—————
— Pentametre	—————	five	—————
— Hexametre	—————	six	—————

\*

### I. THE MONOMETRE.

Only the Spondeus, Iambus, and Anapæst can be gracefully or forcibly used to form a single clause in a stanza ; and even these are rarely so

used but in the finest old English verse, in which every syllable is meant to have full weight.

I take first an exquisite example from Herrick, Iambic dimetre and monometre, with rest.

(THE MORROW SHALL TAKE THOUGHT FOR  
THE THINGS OF ITSELF.)

In endless mirth  
She thinks not on  
What's said, or done,  
In earth.

Nor does she mind,  
Or think on't, now,  
That ever thou  
Wast kind.

These lines are in the very highest manner of central English poetry, the accent being almost equal throughout, because the feeling is far too intense in every word and syllable to permit the marked accentuation of any;—the strength of passion compelling two contractions, otherwise vulgar, here noble;—and the current of expression entirely unbroken by the slightest transposition or strain of word.

Here next—also from Herrick—is an instance of the forceful or expostulant accentuation of the

Iambus; trimetre, dimetre, and monometre in descent, finished with the recurrent trimetre.

## (TO KEEP A TRUE LENT.)

Is this a fast?—to keep  
 The larder lean,  
 And clean  
 From fat of veales and sheep?  
  
 Is it to fast an hour,  
 Or raged to go,  
 Or show  
 A downcast look and sour?  
  
 No; 'tis a fast, to dole  
 Thy sheaf of wheat  
 And meat  
 Unto the hungry soul.  
  
 It is to fast from strife,  
 From old debate,  
 And hate;  
 To circumcise thy life,  
 To show a heart grief-rent,  
 To starve thy sin,  
 Not bin;  
 And that's to keep thy Lent.

The rests in this measure are at the reader's choice; strictly, they fill the vacant places in the

shorter lines, and the last two stanzas are therefore the only perfect ones, allowing the completely measured pauses to enforce the sense.

Many instances of the weighty and appellant or expositulant use of the Iambic monometre might be given from old English writers. The anapæstic monometre has been more beautifully used by the moderns ; but, before giving example of it, I must show more completely the distinction between anapæst and tribrach. I go on, therefore, to the second order of metre.

## II. THE DIMETRE.

I take for first example Hood's beautiful measure in the 'Bridge of Sighs'—double tribrach with choreus and anapæst.

The musical notation consists of five lines of music, each with a treble clef and a common time signature. The lyrics are divided by vertical bar lines. The first line contains 'Take her up | ten - der - ly,' with the first three words on one line and the last three on another. The second line contains 'Lift her with | care ;' with 'Lift her with' on one line and 'care ;' on another. The third line contains 'Fash - ioned so | slen - der - ly,' with 'Fash - ioned so' on one line and 'slen - der - ly' on another. The fourth line contains 'Young, | and so fair.' with 'Young,' on one line and 'and so fair.' on another. The fifth line contains a single note followed by a rest, indicating a pause.

An imperfectly trained reader might at first think these lines were dactylic. But the emotion is entirely continuous, and the accent equal on every syllable, but hastening and trembling all the time, till at last it only comes full on the words ‘young’ and ‘fair.’ The reader will see by the bar divisions how the magnitude of the tribrach syllable, two-thirds of the second, allows the equal time to the choreus, with its short syllable in rest, and the final choreic Anapæst.

The equality of the tribrach is shown perfectly in the beautiful close of the stanza,—

“ Anywhere—anywhere,  
Out—of the world.”

I take next Scott’s coronach in the ‘Lady of the Lake,’ double anapæst, with terminal pause, in quatrain.



It ought in strictness to be called a trimetre with two syllables in rest, but is dimetre to the ear.

“ He is gone on the mountain,  
He is lost to the forest,  
Like a summer-dried fountain,  
When our need was the sorest.”

I place this immediately after the ‘Bridge of Sighs’ in order to show how the anapæst or dactyl may be at once known from the tribrach. If any of the locally short syllables in anapæstic or dactylic verse are by nature long, the verse labours at that syllable: thus ‘dried’ and ‘our’ are both too long for their place in this stanza. But the tribrach will take a long syllable without pressure; and the ‘where’ in ‘anywhere’ does not in the least encumber, though it beautifully deepens the melody.

This metre of Scott’s is a very rare one, being peculiar in the insistence on the pause after the short closing syllable in each verse, as if it had ended in a sob.

The dimetre of long tribrachs



“Which see not—the sight of  
Their own de—solation,”

is a favourite one with Byron; but it is so because susceptible of continually varied stop and division, which would be extremely difficult to express by notation.

The pure iambic dimetre is used chiefly as an intermediate or supplementary line associated with tetrametres. It is in this grouping a great favourite with Burns; e.g.,—

Or,

when the deep, green man-tled earth  
Warm nou- rish'd ev'- ry flow'r- et's birth;  
And joy and mu - sic — pour- ing forth  
In ev' - ry grove,  
I saw thee eye, the gen'- ral mirth  
With bound- less love,

In verses of this blended time, the rests must be left to the reader's feeling, but the general division of this stanza would be as above given, the variations of foot in the tetrametres being almost at pleasure, but the dimetres being strictly double Iambic. In more subtle versification, the accents are effectually equal, every syllable carrying full meaning :

“ Farewell, sweet lass,  
Thy like ne'er was  
For a sweet content, the cause of all my moan.

Poor Coridon

Must live alone :

Other help for him, I see that there is none."

The trochaic dimetre

" Double, double

Toil and trouble,"

and trochaic dimetre with rest for the last syllable

Other | joys—

Are but | toys—

need little notice, being never used at any length,  
or in important passages of verse.

### III. THE TRIMETRE.

We have seen that when lines consist only of one or two metres, they are almost necessarily so pregnant or so forcible in meaning, that their accent cannot be mistaken, nor easily exaggerated : but when we come to what may be called completely constituted lines, in which the metres are never fewer than three, other, and very singular and beautiful, considerations mingle with the laws of barren prosody.

In the first place, observe, that all great poets intend their work to be read by simple people, and expect no help in it from them ; but intend only to give *them* help, in expressing what otherwise they could never have found words for. Therefore

a true master-poet invariably calculates on his verse being first read as prose would be ; and on the reader's being pleasantly surprised by finding that he has fallen unawares into music.

" I said, there was naething I hated like men !  
—The deil gae wi' him, to believe me."

The only doubtful accent in this piece of entirely prosaic and straightforward expression is on the 'him,' and this accent depends on the context. Had the sentiment been, for instance, " He's gaen,—the deil gae wi' him," the accent would probably have been on the 'wi.' But here, the speaker is intent on fastening the fault on her lover instead of herself ; and the accent comes therefore full on the 'him,' if only the reader understands completely the *sense* of what he is reading. That sense being naturally expressed, Burns answers for the prosody : and the entirely simple and almost involuntary burst of temper becomes perfectly flawless anapæstic verse.

Again :

" You have the Pyrrhic dance,—as yet :  
Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone ?  
Of two such lessons, why forget  
The nobler and the manlier one ?"

There is not a forced accent, nor a transposed

syllable, nor a so-called poetic expression, throughout this sentence. But it cannot be read in truth of ordinary feeling and understanding, without falling into march-music.

Again,—and this time I will write the verses in the form of prose, that the lyric measure may indeed be felt unawares.

“They bid me sleep, they bid me pray ; they say my brain is warped and wrung :—I cannot sleep on Highland brae,—I cannot pray in Highland tongue ; But, were I now where Allan glides, or heard my native Devon’s tides, so sweetly would I rest ; and pray, that Heaven would close my wintry day.”

Now all the work of the great masters, without exception, is done to this degree of perfectness ; or if not, the passage is looked on by them as makeshift and slovenly, and permitted only as a painter allows scabbled touching when he is tired ; or it will be put into the mouth of an inferior person, and mark a broken or unworthy feeling.

“Welcome to Stirling towers, fair maid !  
Come ye to seek a champion’s aid,  
On palfrey white, with harper hoar,  
Like errant damozel of yore ?—  
Does thy high quest a knight require,  
Or may the venture suit a squire ?”

This is a squire's address: it is transposed, burlesque-poetical, and artificial throughout; and therefore imperfect verse. Not so Ellen's reply:

“ Her dark eye flash'd—she paused—and sighed,  
‘ Oh, what have I to do with pride ? ’ ”

The reader's knowledge and feeling of the story are supposed to be clear enough to compel the accent on the ‘I,’ which makes the line a faultless Iambic tetrametre—(with choreus for its first foot, of which presently).

But there is much more to be noted in the manner of the great masters than this mere simplicity. If only straightforward prose, arranged so as to fall into metric time, were poetry, any one with an ear could write it. But the strength of poetry is in its thought, not in its form; and with great lyrists, their music is always secondary, and their substance of saying, primary,—so much so, that they will even daringly and wilfully leave a syllable or two rough, or even mean, and avoid a perfect rhythm, or sweetness, rather than let the reader's mind be drawn away to lean too definitely on the sound. ‘Οτι τηδε, for instance, is not a very sonorous or melodious ending for a Greek hexametre, yet it ends the first of the two loveliest lines of poetry the world possesses. So again—

“And I, a maid at your window,  
To be your Valentine,”

is perfect, just because the first line cannot be brought under rhythmic law, the song being in the fact, and not in the sound of it.

On the other hand, the lower order of singers cast themselves primarily into their song, and are swept away with it, (thinking themselves often finer folks for so losing their legs in the stream,) and are in the end little concerned though there be an extremely minute dash and infusion of meaning in the jingle, so only that the words come tuneably :—forcing perhaps an accent or two at last even in these, without any excuse or law for it.

“But vainly thou warrest,  
For this is alone in  
Thy power to declare,  
That in the dim forest  
Thou heard’st a low moaning,  
And found’st a bright lady, surpassingly fair,  
And didst bring her home with thee  
In love and in charity  
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.”

These lines are pretty and flowing in the extreme ; but the war in them is declared only for the sake of a rhyme to forest ; and he mere swing

of the metre is trusted to carry on the slurred rhyme of 'in' to 'ing,' and to compel a vulgar insistence of accent on 'didst' and 'from,' while it is clear from the chinking cadence of 'charity' that the writer has never felt the depth of that word enough to keep him from using it thus disrespectfully for a supplementary dactyl after its equivalent 'love.'

While, however, the entire family of poets may thus be divided into higher and lower orders,—the higher always subordinating their song to their saying, and the lower their saying to their song,—it is throughout to be kept in mind that the primal essence of a poet is in his being a singer, and not merely a man of feeling, judgment, or imagination ; just as it is primarily the business of a painter to paint—however this skill may be afterwards outsoared or restricted by the action of his higher mental powers. And the definition which I gave of poetry in the opening of the third volume of 'Modern Painters,' "the presentment to the imagination of noble grounds for the noble emotions," was defective in this point. I ought to have said, the presentment, *in musical form*, to the imagination, etc. Nor is there any real inequality between the musical and imaginative gifts ; the higher gifts of poetical or pictorial conception are never given

without the parallel bodily faculty : the musical ear of Shakspeare or Dante is just as far finer than Coleridge's, as their sense is stricter ; though they never forget their purposes in their chant : and the touch of Luini is just as much lighter and lovelier than Del Sarto's or Guercino's, as his thoughts are loftier.

And the relation of the forms of poetry to the requirements of actual song is so fixed, that the laws of the four great groups of metre which we are now successively to examine—the trimetre, tetrametre, pentametre, and hexametre—all depend upon the physical power of utterance in the breath. As the first division of their time is from the pace of a man, so the length and rapidity of them are determined by the power of his breath. The trimetre, which does not require a full breath to deliver it, is always an incomplete verse, and only under rare conditions used alone, being nearly always treated as an interposing or grouped line. The tetrametre and pentametre, which require the full breath, but do not exhaust it, constitute the entire body of the chief poetry of energetic nations ; the hexametre, which fully exhausts the breath, is only used by nations whose pleasure was in repose.

Since, as I have just said, the trimetre is so short a line as not to require a full breathing to

utter it, the pause at its end implies always that enough has been said for the speaker's purpose ; and therefore the verse, if used alone, (or with other verses shorter than itself,) is necessarily emphatic and sententious. Here, for first instance, is the iambic trimetre in full power, associated with a stern one, of which the two first metres are mono-syllabic (see above, p. 10,) in the opening, and all the three at the close, of the dialogue.

Tweed	said	to Till,
"What gars	ye rin	sae still?"
Till	said	to Tweed,
"Though I	rin	wi' speed,
And ye	rin	slaw,
Whar ye	droon	ae man,
I	droon	twa."

Nothing can be finer than the alternating and balanced variations of the metre in this old Scottish rhyme, conducting, with the strength of a black eddy, the current of the verse to its massive close in the three minims.

In lighter measure, but with the same fulness of intent,—

In a drear | night - ed | De - cem - ber,

Too hap - py, hap - py, brook,

Thy bub - blings ne'er re - mem - ber

A - pol - lo's sum - mer look ;

But with a sweet for - get - ting,

They stay their crys - tal fret - ting,

— Ne - ver, ne - ver pet - ting

A - bout the fro - zen time.

The long tribachs for third foot in these lines show the peculiar use of this metre in more or less pensive or languid termination. Here, on the contrary, is the anapæst, giving careless energy :

And let me the can - a - kin clink, clink,  
And let me the can - a - kin clink;  
A sold- ier's a man,  
A life's but a span,  
Why then, let a sold - ier drink.

This stanza is, in the essential structure of it, an ordinary quatrain of tetrametre with trimetre, broken into its present form by drunken gravity of pause upon, and repetition of, the word 'clink'; and drunken division into careless anapæsts of the third line; the real form from which this stanza is derived being simply—



which is the normal form of the pure ballad quatrain, and at least in three to one proportion against all other measures in Border song, although never, in the fine types of it, without exquisite intervals and change in its measure, partly expressive of emotion breaking rhythm, and partly of a simplicity which cannot perfectly contrive rhythm.

“Ye lee, ye lee, ye bonny lad,  
Sae loud’s I hear ye lee,  
For I’m Lord Randal’s ae daughter,  
He has nae mair nor me.”

This stanza is entirely regular, except in the beautiful change of into in the word ‘daughter.’

The analysis becomes more difficult in the next but one following verse :—

And he has taen up his bonny sis - ter,  
With the big tear in his een;,  
And he has bur - ied his bon - ny sis - ter,  
A - mong the hol - lins green.

This is very beautiful, but requires extreme care in reading ;—the closing stanza is quite perfect ; normal, except in the anapaëst in the third line, which consummates its expression.

“ I carena for your hinds, my lord,  
I carena for your fee,  
But oh, and oh, for my bonny hind  
Beneath the hollin tree !”

It becomes, however, quite impossible to analyze the varieties of accent which the trimetre admits in this grouping, when the melody of it is modified by the pauses or failing of the voice in strong passion : and the power either of enjoying or

singing them depends entirely on the general fineness of sympathy and ear; so that their treatment would be modified by every great singer or actress according to her own temper or thought at the moment.

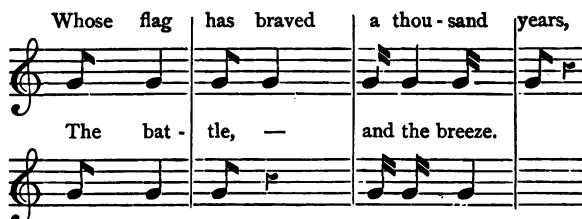
“Yestreen the Queen had four Maries;  
The night, she'll hae but three:  
There was Marie Seaton, and Marie Beaton,  
And Marie Carmichael,—and me.”

A quite endless variety of intonation and musical time might be given, and always gracefully, to this one stanza, by good readers.

But poetry of this kind belongs essentially to periods when the passions are strong, and the arts simple. In more finished, or at least more disciplined, song, it is almost impossible to retain the intensity of passion; but most accomplished work of this kind has been done by Campbell, with the advantage of more general motives of sentiment: perhaps no other master has used trimetre verse with so subtle skill.

Ye mar - i - ners of Eng - land,

Who guard our na - tive seas,



The reader may perhaps be surprised at my division of the emphatic ‘a thousand years’ into short notes. But he will find, on trying the verse with full heart in it, what an utterly different force the phrase has in its present place from what it would have taken in the common measure;— suppose—

“ Whose flag has drooped a thousand years,  
Betrayed by guilt, and dimmed by tears.”

Or, again, take the great following stanza, of which the prosody is accurately the same :—

“ Britannia needs no bulwarks,  
No towers along the steep ;  
Her march is o'er the mountain wave,  
Her home is on the deep ;”

and it will be found that the cadence of close in the third line is altogether different from that which the same words would take in the sequence of ordinary and equally timed iambic verse; as, for instance,—

"O'er blue ravine, in thund'rous cave,  
Distorted rose the mountain wave."

Nevertheless, the time, in all clauses of metre so much affected by passion, is partly left to the reader's will; and the words may be dwelt upon, or hastened, as the impulse comes on him: so that always, if we added melody to the words, many of the passages might advisably be given in different time; for example:—

Ye mar - i - ners of Eng - land,

Who guard our na - tive seas,

Whose flag has braved a thou - sand years,

## 42 ELEMENTS OF ENGLISH PROSODY.

The battle, and the breeze.

Bri - tan - nia needs no bul - warks,

No towers a - long the steep,

Her march is o'er the moun - tain wave,

Her Home is on the Deep.

There is much less difficulty in timing the verse of Campbell when he uses, instead of the trine dactyl, his favourite foot, the trine anapæst. The—so far as I know, unique—measure of the ‘Battle of the Baltic,’ which at first, and by a careless reader, might be taken for trimetre, “Of Nel|son and |the North”| has in fact only one trimetric line in mid-stanza; and the rest are all dimetres, “Of Nelson | and the North”| closing with a monometre formed by one massy anapæst, thus (reading from the mid-stanza):

It was ten of A - pril morn by the chime

As they drif - ted on their path,

There was si - lence deep as death,

And the bol - dest held his breath

For a time.

Taking the three short syllables of the trine anapæsts as triplet, the time of the metres is

perfectly equal throughout, which gives the intended calm to the whole stanza, as of vessels moving at commanded pace under perfectly steady wind. It is impossible to find a more finished example of this majestic evenness, for comparison with the troubled and broken pathos of the Scottish ballad metres.

Finally, in the last line of the stanza of 'Hohenlinden,' (a complex trimetre of iambus, tribrach, and dactyl,) a very curious example is given of the proportioned decline of power in the dactyl which is the origin of the name of that foot. There are other niceties in the versification which may begin well for us the study of the tetrametre.

On Lin - den, when the sun was low,

All spot - less lay th' un - trod - den snow,

And dark as win - ter, was the flow

Of I - ser roll-ing ra - pidly.

I have written the three first lines of this stanza as Iambic tetrametres, of which the second is normal, and the first and third are modified by the placing of the breath-rest. But I should certainly *read* the first and third as trimetres, thus, “On Linden, | when the sun| was low,” | and it is well to consider the Iambic tetrametre as a verse at any time replaceable by trimetres composed of groups of syllables whose collective time shall be of equal value ; and thus, in writing the prosody of any varied passage, to use tribrachs or dactyls corresponding with the natural punctuation. But, in allowing this variation in the number of its bars, the Iambic tetrametre (for the first time, observe, in our progressive inquiry) withdraws itself from ordinary musical laws, and approaches the conditions of unfettered speech. Into which quality of it we must now look more carefully.

#### IV. THE TETRAMETRE.

Between the trimetre and tetrametre there exists a singular form of intermediate verse, of little importance in English or Teutonic poetry, but of very great importance in Greek. This intermediate form is, however, in its real time, tetrametric, and

to be considered as an imperfect or nascent type of the symmetric four-barred verse. It is formed by the elongation of the last syllable of the long tribrach, when the trimetre normally ends with that foot. We shall get the transition perfectly exemplified in Burns' play with his favourite stanza.

Some kin - dle, cou - thie, side | by side,  
 An' burn to - ge - ther, trim-ly;  
 Some start a - wa wi' sau - cy pride,  
 And jump out owre the chim-lie,  
 Fu high, that night.

This stanza, observe, is simply the alternate tetrametre and trimetre, with the long tribrach for its last foot, occupying the place of an iambus, and replaced by an iambus at will, as in the next following verse:—

Jean slips in twa, wi' ten - tie ee;  
 Wha 'twas, she wad - na tell;  
 But this is Jock, and this is me,  
 She says, in - to her - sell.

The reader may note at once in this place that the graceful and subtle substitutions of two equally timed syllables for the iambus, constantly permitted by Burns in this and other similar poems, are one of the proper distinctions of dramatic from epic verse, in which last the metre must always be perfect,—of which more presently: the point at present is to observe that the third foot in the second and fourth lines of this stanza is a pure iambus, for which the long tribachs in the preceding stanza are accurate equivalents. But in the next stanza there is a quite new time:—

He bleezed| ow're her, | and she | ow're him,  
As they wad ne - ver mair part;  
Till, fuff, he star - ted up the lum,  
And Jean had een a sair heart,  
To see't that night.

The second and fourth lines of this stanza take a closing long syllable, which cannot be in the least hurried, and has a distinct quaver rest after it, forming a perfect fourth foot. In this form, the tribach with terminal long syllable and rest is the lyric verse of Anacreon; and in that constant measure, varied only by occasional anapæsts, he contentedly writes the entire body of his odes; in which, indeed, the sentiment requires little variation in its expression, but might at least without harm have received it; and whose changeless tenor, when compared, both as to form and contained moral, with the lyric passages, from highest to lowest chord

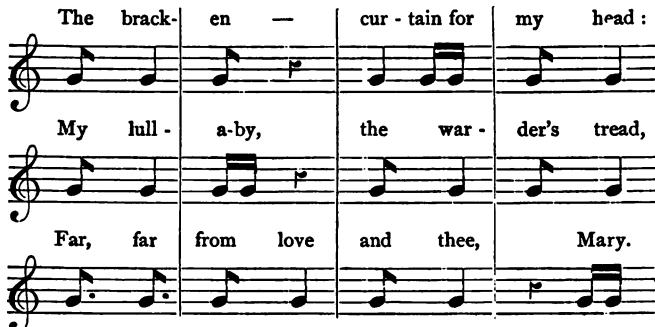
of passion, mingled with the acutest philosophy and loftiest patriotism, which are alike fantastic and majestic in the Eolian song of Horace and of Burns,—must be thought of more as the song of a cicada than of a human being.

And this contented accuracy and continuity of temper, as of rhythm, regulating, as it does, much of what has been thought most majestic or severe in Greek architecture,—often fancied to be pure when it is merely stupid,—has yet to be analyzed in its good and bad elements;—what is orderly in it discerned clearly from what is mechanical; and what is simple and contented from what is monotonous, and even brutal; or, to use at once a word more tender and more Greek, ‘ornithic’—‘birdy.’

The Anacreontic tetrametre is, as above said, almost useless in English verse; it cannot be written continuously by any artifice of words; and even in occasional use, seldom pleasantly, unless by dividing its closing long syllable into two short ones, and putting the quaver rest before instead of after them, as in the last line of this stanza.



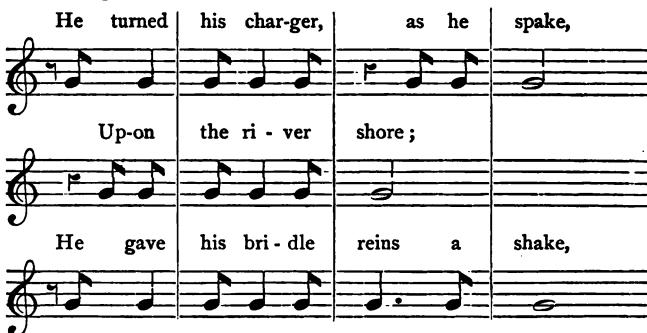
## 50 ELEMENTS OF ENGLISH PROSODY.

The brack- en — cur - tain for my head :  
  
 My hull - a-by, the war - der's tread,  
 Far, far from love and thee, Mary.

The reader may perhaps at first think that there is no rest in this last foot, and that the two syllables of the name should be of equal length, .

But the stanza is sung *running*; and the broken short syllables at its close exactly indicate the failure of the breath. Try the line with 'Marie' instead of Mary, and the placing of the pause in the actual form will be instantly felt, by its opposition to the continuous iambic.

So again in the fourth line here,—

He turned his char-ger, as he spake,  
  
 Up-on the ri - ver shore ;  
  
 He gave his bri - dle reins a shake,  




in which the two short syllables indicate contempt.

The prosody of this entire stanza is very difficult and interesting, and could only be given rightly by a considerable variation in gradated time at the reader's judgment—slackening, that is to say, after the strong first and third lines, so as to give the short syllables of the opening foot in the second, fourth, and fifth, more actual time than they could have rhythmically.

Putting, then, this too rare and accidental English, and too formal Greek, tetrametre out of question, the real and useful tetrametres are essentially these following.

i. Pure Choreic, consisting of four full choreuses : the last allowed to pass into a spondeus, if necessary. It is the measure of 'Hiawatha,' and very beautiful in Longfellow's hand ; rightly chosen for its wild and sweet monotony : no other would have expressed so much of the soft current and tender constancy of Indian nature. But it is not a measure suited to the general purposes of English literature.

2. Terminated Choreic; consisting of three full choreuses, and one long syllable with closing rest for the fourth foot. The general measure of the best English Choreic verse.

Ru - in | seize thee, | ruth - less | king.

3. The appellant Iambic, beginning with an impetuous single syllable, after an emphatic rest.

Now's | the day, | and now's | the hour.

4. The pure Iambic without the opening rest.

The west- ern waves | of ebb - ing day.

5. Dactylic, with closing rest, long or short.

La - dybird, | La - dybird, | fly away | home.

6th, and lastly, Anapæstic, the most energetic of English verses.

A touch | to her hand, | and a word | to her ear.

Of these metres, the second, or terminated Choreic, is almost always as distinctly appellant as the appellant Iambic; but not compulsorily so; and it may be, at the reader's pleasure, called the Trochaic tetrametre, waiving the distinction between Chorus and Troche. I have always so called it when occurring in the 'Sidney Psalter.'

But, as above noticed, its energy is lost, or quite unnecessary, in continuous narrative or sentiment; and good poets therefore only use the measure as an appellant one.

" Dearest Saviour, *if* my soul  
Were but worth the having."

" *What*, child! is the balance thine?  
*Thine* the poise or measure?"

It is to be noticed also that this measure is only, in strictness, preferable to appellant Iambic, when the stress is on the beginning rather than the close of the thought,—as in the above lines. And it is only the reader's feeling of this difference, and the poet's art in placing the division of the words rightly, which distinguish one line from the other. No good reader, for instance, could divide, as follows, the line

" Wha sae—base, wad—be a—slave."

If so divided, it would be a pure Choreic ; but its right division,

“ Wha—sae base—wad be—a slave,”  
makes it appellant Iambic.

On the other hand, the pure Choreic,

“ What, child !—is the—balance—thine ?”  
could by none but the worst readers be changed into an appellant Iambic thus :

“ What !—child, is—the ba—lance thine !”

Of the third form, pure Iambic tetrametre, the full value and power have only been shown by Scott and Byron. The absolutely best verses in this measure in the English language, commanding themselves to every ear and every heart, and so accurately constructed as to be almost independent of the reader's skill, may be found in the Bride of Abydos, Giaour, and Siege of Corinth. Lovelier rhythms exist, dependent for their music on the feeling of the reader, but of purely constructed and errorless verse, there are no other such examples.

Of dactylic and anapæstic verse, also, with the full beat of rhythm in them, Scott, Burns, and Byron have given the most perfect models. But none of these symmetrically constructed dactylic songs have the delicately varied beauty of some of the mixed ones of Elizabethan time, where the lines

are indeed each rather a separately invented melody than normal verse :

“ Then wouldest thou learn to carol of love,  
 And hery with hymns thy lass's glove ;  
 Then wouldest thou pipe of Phillis' praise,  
 But Phillis is mine for many days.  
 I won her with a girdle of gelt  
 Embost with bugle about the belt,  
 Such an one shepherds would make full fain,  
 Such an one would make thee young again.”

It is impossible, however, to examine analytically verses of this variable melody ; one can only say, as one may of prose, that they have been written by a person with an ear—or without one, and that they are either entirely delightful, or good for nothing.

## V. THE PENTAMETRE.

Upon adding the fifth foot to our gradually lengthening line, we find ourselves fallen suddenly under hitherto unfelt limitation. The verses we have hitherto examined may be constructed at pleasure of any kind of metre—dactyl, troche, iamb, or anapæst. But all at once, we now find this liberty of choice refused. We may write a pentametre verse in iambs only.

A most notable phenomenon, significant of much more than I can at present understand,—how much less explain;—conditions, indeed, first of breathing, which are merely physical, and as such explicable enough, only not worth explaining; but, beyond these, feelings, and instincts of speech, full of complex interest, and introducing us, in spite of ourselves, to all the grammatical questions of punctuation, and logical ones of clause, and division, which I must not attempt to deal with at present; the historical fact being quite indubitable and unalterable, that no poet has ever attempted to write pentametre in any foot but the iamb, and that the addition of another choreus to a choreic tetrametre—or of another dactyl to a dactylic one, will instantly make them helplessly prosaic and unreadable.

Leaving the reader to try such experiment at his leisure, and to meditate on the causes of it at his liking, I shall content myself with stating the principal laws affecting the manner and construction of the iambic pentametre, the most important, and that by far, of all accepted divisions of sentence in the English language.

Pentametre verse divides itself essentially into three kinds:—

A. Sententious.

- B. Personally emotional.
- C. Dramatic.

A. Sententious pentametre.

In this kind of verse, the structure and rhyme (if rhyme be admitted) are used merely to give precision and weight to a prose sentence, otherwise sifted, abstracted, and corrected into extremest possible value. Such verse professes always to be the result of the writer's utmost wisdom and utmost care; it admits therefore of no careless or imperfect construction, but allows any intelligible degree of inversion; because it has been considered to the end, before a word is written, and the placing of the words may afterwards be adjusted according to their importance. Thus, "Sir Plume, of amber snuff-box justly vain," is not only more rhythmic, but more elegant and accurate than "Sir Plume, justly vain of his amber snuff-box :" first, because the emphasis of rhyme is laid on his vanity, not his box ; secondly, because the 'his,' seen on full consideration to be unnecessary, is omitted, to concentrate the sentence ; and with a farther and more subtle reason, which, unless the reader knows my 'Munera Pulveris,' I cannot explain to him here,—namely, that a coxcomb cannot, properly speaking, *possess* anything, but is

possessed by everything, so that in the next line Pope does not say, "And the nice conduct of *his* clouded cane," but of *a* clouded cane.

The sententious epic\* may, however, become spoken instead of written language, if the speech be deliberate and of well-considered matter; but this kind of verse never represents precisely what the speaker is supposed to have said, but the *contents* of his speech, arranged so as to make it more impressive or memorable, as continually in Wordsworth's 'Excursion.'

On the contrary, if the speech be dramatic,—that is to say, representing what the speaker actually would have said,—no forced inversion or artificial arrangement is allowable; and

"We are glad the dauphin is so pleasant  
with us,"

must for no cause and under no pretence become,

"We are glad the dauphin is with us so  
pleasant."

All the work of Pope, Goldsmith, and Johnson is in sententious pentametre; in which emotion,

\* I believe the word 'epic' is usually understood by English readers to mean merely a long and grand poem instead of a short slight one—at least, I know that as a boy I remained long under that impression myself. It really means a poem in which story-telling, and philosophical reflection as its accompaniment, take the place of dramatic action, and impulsive song.

however on sufferance admitted, never leads or disturbs the verse, nor refuses to be illustrated by ingenious metaphor. In this manner some of the wisest, and many of the acutest, things ever said by man, have been put into perfect syllables by Pope and Goldsmith. Johnson is of quite viler metal, and has neither ear nor imagination; yet the weight of his common-sense gave him such favour with both Scott and Byron, that they alike regard him as one of their masters. I fancy neither of them ever tried to read Irene.

#### B. Emotional pentametre.

The measure of Gray's Elegy, Lycidas, and the Corsair,—sentiment always guiding and deepening the melody, while a lyric sweetness binds the verses into unbroken flow.

It always implies an affectionate and earnest personality in the writer; never admits satire; and rarely blame, unless, as in Lycidas, with the voice of an accusing angel. The forms of its music, always governed by feeling, are not to be analyzed by any cunning, nor represented by any signs; but the normal divisions of the verse are studiously accurate, and all artificial inversions forbidden.

Thus—

“ He asked no questions ; all were answered now

is a perfect line of emotional pentametre ; but would be an entirely unendurable one if, in order to rhyme to ‘call’ or ‘fall,’ it had been written,

“No questions asked he ; answered now were all.”

### C. Dramatic pentametre.

On the contrary, in noble dramatic verse, the divisions are purposefully *inaccurate* ;—the accepted cadence of the metre being allowed only at intervals, and the prosody of every passionate line thrown into a disorder which is more lovely than any normal order, as the leaves of a living tree are more lovely than a formal honeysuckle ornament on a cornice ;—the inner laws and native grace being all the more perfect in that they are less manifest. But the study of dramatic melody is the study also of dramatic truth, and entirely beyond the scope of these pages.

## VI. THE HEXAMETRE.

The hexametre in English poetry exists only as an occasional (usually concluding) line—the conclusion with which it is burdened being broad and lingering, as opposed to the trenchant power of shorter lines in termination of stanzas.

Known generally in English as the ‘Alexandrine,’

it becomes the properly final clause of the Spenserian stanza, and may be employed grandly in irregular verse by a good master; but it cannot be used for consecutive verses,—always, if so treated, dividing itself instantly and naturally either into couplets of trimetre, or triplets of dimetre. In this last division,

“But look around, and choose thy ground,  
And take thy rest,”

it is entirely lovely; and no poet of power or feeling ever binds it, habitually, into cumbrous unity. The standard power of the line is only in the close of Elizabethan stanza, or disciplined ode; where it may even pass into the heptametre, the longest admitted—or even to the breath—possible, verse of the English language—

“Shout round me, let me hear thee shout,  
thou happy shepherd-boy.”

Lastly, note that the force of the classic hexametre, iambic with anapæsts for the drama, and spondeic with dactyls for the epic, is not reducible under any laws of English prosody. For my own part, I perceive scarcely any music, but only a pert and monotonous symmetry, in the dramatic hexametre; and I never read Greek tragedy for its language, but only for its matter. Of the epic hexametre,

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and the lyric Latin measures of Horace, I could perhaps, with time, point out more beauty than most English readers recognize in them; but beauty of a kind which the scholars who have been trained to write imitations of them would perhaps scarcely acknowledge; and which in some cases I cannot be sure of rightly interpreting.

Here, therefore, for the present I close my notes on prosody. What more I know, or feel, respecting many things here so imperfectly treated, will be, I trust, set down with sufficiency in the essays on Scott and Byron, which I have begun in the pages of 'The Nineteenth Century': and what I do not know, and have not felt, supplied in due time by some student of language and of music happier in their mastership than I; and not less reverent of their honour.

J. RUSKIN.

ABBEVILLE, 26th August, 1880.

END.





